

Evolution of the Annual Meeting Program

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The annual national program of the American Phytopathological Society goes through an interesting process of evolution. It takes 5 years to build because the Meeting Site Selection Committee makes its decisions that far in advance. The president-elect is program chairman by edict of the Constitution. He must gaze into a crystal ball and anticipate how many people will be interested in listening to each of the more than 500 abstracts. Rooms large enough to hold the audience must be provided.

The traditional part of the program will be as it has been for the past 73 meetings. Oral presentation of a specific piece of research has been the heartbeat of our meetings. Research papers are so central to the program that Council appointed a special committee to "break" the tradition in planning the 75th Anniversary Celebration—the Diamond Jubilee of 1983. That program will consist of about 20 symposia instead of the usual two or three. But I'm getting ahead of myself. Evolution is neither so rapid nor so direct. A certain amount of trial and error is involved, so let us go step by step.

The objective of any program is to serve its audience, the members of our Society. Since our Society's objective is to promote the increase and diffusion of all aspects of knowledge relating to plant diseases and their control, the program stresses education. When you come to the annual APS meeting you seek to exchange information, to be stimulated by and to generate new ideas, to search for alternate research strategies, to learn new techniques. Young scientists develop confidence and gain trust in peer scientists. We all learn the meaning of excellence because one does not take lightly the thought of exposing theories, ideas, and concepts without careful preparation to defend them before an interested but critical audience.

In the early days of APS, the program included a single session of relatively informal papers plus a field trip to the research plots at the host university. As our membership increased, several changes occurred. We met for more than one day. Then we had to start scheduling concurrent paper sessions, which brought stiff criticism because members were missing half or more of the meeting. Once the 500–600 attendance mark was passed, we began meeting in a hotel occasionally. Hotels usually have the advantage of allowing people to change quickly from one paper session to another for the most efficient use of time; campuses have the advantage of being less expensive and allowing us to learn more about a sister institution. Programs are relatively easier to plan for a hotel. Our Society now needs up to eight concurrent sessions each morning and afternoon—for four days. This logically led to presenting papers in related areas together. As areas of specialization increased, so did the number of subject matter committees.

Until the 1930s, one person with some help developed the program. The present Program Committee has 27 members: the president-elect, vice-president, and secretary representing Council, plus the chairman of each of the 20 subject matter committees and of the Extension, Industry, Public Relations, and Teaching committees. Each chairman seeks program suggestions from his or her committee members. If you wish direct input into the program, contact your subject matter committee chairman or the president-elect. Volunteers make it work; no one is paid. A volunteer for committee work makes his or her own teaching, research, and public service work easier.

The 1982 program in Salt Lake City involves the traditional exchange of information in research papers and field trips but we also have symposia, discussion sessions, teach-ins, workshops, poster sessions, and a slide salon. Each has its own way of educating, of imparting knowledge, of sharing insight.

The poster sessions are new to APS within the last 5 years. They allow fewer concurrent sessions and longer periods (up to a day) to study details. Some individuals whose results are presented primarily as electron micrographs with fine detail or in complex tables prefer posters to a 10- or 15-minute oral presentation.

Discussion sessions allow maximal interaction of the audience with the speaker. A well-conducted discussion is exciting and possibly the most educational type of session. Teach-ins and workshops, variants of the discussion session, have the added advantage of "hands-on" experience.

The slide salon allows for competition in selecting outstanding visuals for wider distribution. It also serves as a clearinghouse for teachers and extension specialists, among others, to arrange for collecting duplicate copies from colleagues to upgrade their own visual aid collections.

Most divisions are now making special arrangements for paper-judging contests to evaluate graduate student presentations. These sessions stimulate great interest among both students and faculty. A trophy or plaque and sometimes cash add incentive, but the greatest payoff is knowing you excelled.

The Program Committee is charged with selecting three symposia from among the usual seven to ten requests. This is a most difficult task because each requested symposium is well conceived, already half planned, and timely and often has two or more committees "lobbying" for its inclusion in the program. A symposium request cosponsored by two or three committees may be weighted more heavily than that with a single sponsor. Because of the effort that goes into symposia, the Program Committee maintains a backlog list by date of submission. Although no hard-and-fast rules exist, those with one or more years of "seniority" are weighted during the voting process. These details may provide some insight into how hard committee chairmen work for you. In the final analysis, the most timely requests with the greatest scientific and educational merit are selected.

What are your responsibilities? You should participate actively in several kinds of sessions, both in your specialty and in allied fields to broaden your horizons. If everyone does his or her share, our national meeting in Salt Lake City August 8–12 cannot help but succeed. We look forward to seeing you there.